IN CANCER SURVEY—

Air Pollution Overshadows Smoking

By BRIAN SULLIVAN

Air pollution is apparently more important in the development of lung cancer than is cigarette smoking, a leading government scientist said today.

Dr. Wilhelm C. Heuper, chief of the environmental cancer section of the National Cancer Institute, based this estimate on a study completed within the last few weeks. He reported his study today to the 1960 Industrial Health Conference.

The new study—one never undertaken before — showed that continuous exposure over long periods to low-level doses of cancer-producing agents leads to more cancer cells than does exposure to large doses.

This type of exposure, he said in an interview, is the kind to which man is subjected day after day in large urban areas.

He said urban dwellers get "long, repeated, continuous exposure to small doses of carcinogens (cancer-producing agents) in urban air."

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HIS STUDY was made with benzpyrene, a substance which is known to produce cancer in animals and is a prime suspect of producing cancer in humans.

A paper given here yesterday at the 1960 Industrial Health Conference is universally present in the air of American cities. It arises largely from the combustion of fuels.

Dr. Heuper said that the effects of cigarette smoking are only one part of the overall picture but emphasized that he nonetheless believes cigarettes contain cancer-causing agents.

He noted that the statistics on lung cancer are related to the size of the community. He said there is no reason to believe that city dwellers smoke that much more than non-urban dwellers.

Dr. Hueper said the study is "something one should really have done long ago."

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THE NEW STUDY was conducted over two years, using samples from eight American cities. He did not release the names of the cities.

Large single doses of the benzpyrene were given to mice in one phase of the investigation, he said.

At the same time, another group of mice were given smaller doses — below the level which produces cancer in single doses — and these mice showed "a much higher response and a much more prolonged one," he said.

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THE STUDY is only the beginning of a series of investigations into the widespread problem of air pollution, Dr. Hueper said.

Being planned is a check of specific cities, in which the government scientists will search for specific pollutants, he said.

Dr. Hueper noted that there was a sharp upward swing in the levels of cancer when he was in Germany in the 1920s, before cigarette smoking became such a common habit.

And in England, he said, evidence was shown that "the bigger the town, the higher the lung cancer rate."

Dr. Hueper last year won the American Assn. for the Advancement of Science-Anne Frankel Rosenthal Memorial Award for Cancer Research.

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